World Chronicle

UNITED NATIONS

PROGRAMME: No. 833 recorded 30 May 2001

GUEST: Andre Heitz
General-Secretary
Federation of International Civil Servants Associations

JOURNALIST: Tuyet Nguyen, German Press Agency/DPA
Judy Lessing, Radio New Zealand

MODERATOR: Michael Littlejohns

SAFETY FOR UN STAFF

The challenges faced by UN system and humanitarian personnel working in dangerous locations, makes security and its management an imperative. In 1999, there were almost 300 reported violent incidents involving United Nations staff throughout the world, including robberies, physical assault, rape, vehicle hijacking and murder. In this edition of **World Chronicle,** Andre Heitz, General-Secretary of the Federation of International Civil Servants Associations, talks about the deteriorating situation for UN employees working in critical situations around the globe.

WORLD CHRONICLE is produced by the Media Division, Department of Public Information, United Nations, New York, NY 10017, U.S.A.

Duration: 27:57"
Executive Producer: Chaim Litewski
Director: Livingston Hinckley
Production Assistant: Corazon A. Icasas

ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues.

Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

The right to safety is a life or death issue for those working in United Nations peacekeeping missions and humanitarian operations. There has been a marked increase of United Nations staff members being kidnapped, held hostage and, in the last eight years, more than 200 UN employees have been killed. Can anything be done to protect those who are in troubled countries protecting the lives of others? The Federation of International Civil Servants Associations (FICSA) promotes the interests of the staff of the United Nations and its specialized agencies. The deteriorating situation for staff in the field has led FICSA to make this issue one of its top priorities.

Our guest today is the General-Secretary of FICSA, Andre Heitz. Joining me to talk with Mr. Heitz are Tuyet Nguyen of the *German Press Agency/DPA* and Judy Lessing of *Radio New Zealand*.

Mr. Heitz, welcome to **World Chronicle.**

Mr. Heitz, I see from your background that you're an agronomist by training and you worked for a quarter of a century at the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants, which is associated with the World Intellectual Property Organization, which is a UN agency. Now you are protecting UN staff all over the world -- or trying to --and you came to New York to appear before the Security Council, which was a first for this particular issue, I believe. Now, what can the Security Council do that it hasn't done already to further the interests of the staff in the field and try to improve protective services for them?

HEITZ: Thank you for the opportunity to speak to **World Chronicle** in the first place. Secondly, you rightly said that this was a first in the life of the United Nations because after 55 years, at the end of May 2001, the Security Council held a meeting at which the staff, FICSA, was invited to present their views on the physical security of the staff. So what can the Security Council do? Actually it can do a lot of things. I would say, first of all, ensure within its own mandate that the security of the staff is a component of its decision-making process so that staff are not sent to impossible missions. The second thing which the Security Council can do is serve as a role model for the other organizations, and I think in particular of the humanitarian organizations which are sending people to save lives, sometimes not taking care enough for the lives of their

own employees. You can also talk about the other organizations, the third circle, which are those which do development activities because in that case as well you have staff who go into difficult areas. And you can even talk about the fourth circle of organizations, those which are mainly headquarters-based – I come from one of them. And those ones send people all over the world, usually in capitals, but frequently without any kind of information about the behaviour they should adopt when they arrive in those places.

LITTLEJOHNS: But Mr. Heitz, the large part of the problem comes from irresponsible groups – terrorists, fundamental people – who are doing some rather crazy things. I mean they are not going to pay the slightest bit of attention to what the Security Council might say or do because they are out of control. And these are the people who surely are the main threat to UN staff in the field, aren't they?

HEITZ: These are perhaps not the main threat because one threat is one threat too much but surely they are a very big threat and they are, increasingly, a big threat. So the Security Council has to reflect on the matter. And when the meeting took place at the end of May several delegations said that the Security Council had to be creative and innovative. They have to create something which would force those groups to abide by international standards – humanitarian standards – and frankly, when it is not possible, then the organizations will have to decide whether or not to send people into those areas.

LITTLEJOHNS: As we say in America, lots of luck.

NGUYEN: Mr. Heitz, is this a problem with governments or is it with the Council? You see, the Council has adopted numerous resolutions asking governments to provide protection to UN employees. If governments don't control their territories what can they do? If rebel groups do not ...

LITTLEJOHNS: Yes, that's my point exactly.

NGUYEN: Yes, what can they do? You know, the Council sits in New York giving out orders, or asking governments to be responsible, but they cannot do that so what can you do to protect UN employees?

HEITZ: If a territory is controlled by what we now call *de facto* authorities it may be the UN system will have to enter into contact with these authorities and sort the matter out. It is a very difficult political problem because in some ways you would recognize the existence of that *de facto* authority and you would give that *de facto* authority an image which they are, of

course, seeking. But the reality is that you must do something and if you don't do it maybe the answer is the system must not go into these territories.

NGUYEN: You see military observers are accompanied by troops to provide logistics and also security for the military observers. UN employees go alone as civilians. Don't you think they should also be provided protection by peacekeeping troops?

HEITZ: Well, I cannot make a general statement on that because the situations are very different from one area to the other but one can very well imagine that in a particular situation the answer is that the humanitarians should be accompanied and supported by peacekeeping or, name them how you want, other support units.

LESSING: I was in Timor and this question about protection was very important – this was before the actual referendum in August 1999 – and the question that kept coming up from our local staff without whom we could not have worked – you know they were our interpreters, they did everything, they worked together with us – was when are the peacekeepers coming? And of course the answer was, if you are going to be brutally honest, they are not coming, or if they come they're not going to come in time so you better make your own arrangements. But there were a number of occasions in Timor when in fact the local staff were not treated as well as they should have been treated. They were treated if you like as, well you could say second class, but in my opinion they were treated like third class people. They didn't count. Security arrangements weren't made for them. At the very end they were indeed evacuated but I think that was a matter of luck and circumstance. What can you do for people who, in good faith, come and work for the UN, work next to a UN employee as a national employee but get no protection?

HEITZ: We in FICSA have been fighting for many, many years to ensure that the UN system does not have a security handbook or field security handbook which basically says that when the situation deteriorates the internationally-recruited staff will be able to get on a lorry and leave behind their colleagues, locally recruited ...

LESSING: Just wave goodbye to them. So long.

HEITZ: ...and wave goodbye to them yes, or good luck. And I'm pleased to say that we had an *ad hoc* inter-agency meeting on security. Mind you, it is *ad hoc* I believe for the last 13 years. It's perhaps a sign. That meeting took place in Paris, again in May – it was from the 14th through the 18th – and we had the revision of the security handbook on the agenda. And for the first time, really for the first time, the handbook now provides that when the situation gets to

the point where we evacuate the non-essential internationally-recruited staff, the designated official, the person responsible for the security arrangements, has to look for a solution for locally recruited staff; a solution which is in particular, or the first priority, a relocation to a safe haven.

LESSING: This means a safe haven in the country where they are?

HEITZ: In the country itself, yes.

LESSING: We're not talking about evacuation, we're talking about moving from one very dangerous place to somewhere perhaps it's a little less dangerous? That's not much of a choice.

HEITZ: Believe me, it is formidable progress in United Nations terms. It is also perhaps reaching the current limit of what is possible because when we're talking about locally recruited staff we're talking about the nationals of the country itself. And I believe it is difficult in legal terms to have something which provides for the evacuation of these people into another country.

LESSING: Even though the situation may have so deteriorated that their own governments can't possibly take care of them even if they wanted to?

HEITZ: You are making a point which we will continue to make with the UN authorities. I am capitalizing for the time being,on that major step which has been taken but obviously it is not enough in cases where we have locally recruited staff members.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is **World Chronicle.** Our guest is Andre Heitz, General-Secretary of FICSA.

Mr. Heitz, give us some examples of things that have happened in the field to UN staff. This was a not a person who is a UN staffer but someone employed by the International Committee of the Red Cross. In fact, the very day before you testified in the Security Council this woman went to a pharmacist in Yaounde, in Cameroon, in Africa for medicine for her one-month-old child who was sick and in the store, or the shop. She was stabbed and died in the hospital before surgery could be performed. Now, I don't see how anything that the Security Council could do could protect someone from that kind of incident. Now what other incidents have occurred that you think the Security Council or the UN or the agencies themselves could have done that they didn't do?

HEITZ: I'm not going to look into all the past to find one of those examples but let us go back to Timor to illustrate the problem of locally recruited staff. These people were assisting

the United Nations in a process of independence reclamation and when the situation got very tense, of course these locally recruited staff were the primary target of all those people who were against independence. So what does the UN system do? Fortunately, I understand that the Australian Government has been, I would say, realistic enough to provide the means of evacuating the staff and has accepted to take them on their territory. But this is an example of good behaviour on the part of the UN and a Member State.

NGUYEN: Mr. Heitz, let's take the case of UN employees kidnapped by rebel groups in Tajikistan for example, should the UN pay the kidnappers to free its employees?

LITTLEJOHNS: Ransom money, you mean?

NGUYEN: Ransom money. Or if they ask for ransom should you go along with it?

HEITZ: The UN has a policy which says no ransom and as long as the policy is known those who kidnap know what the policy is and they behave accordingly.

NGUYEN: So no negotiations either with the kidnappers?

HEITZ: There are, of course, negotiations to release the kidnapped staff member but the aim of the negotiation is to convince the kidnappers that they didn't make the right decision and that it is in their interest to release the staff member.

NGUYEN: So in the UN Secretariat who is in charge of providing security for the employees? Is there an administration that takes care of those issues?

HEITZ: In the UN proper there is a department, which is called UNSECOORD, the United Nations Security Coordination, which provides the coordination and provides basic services. And then, of course, you will have to have the various security arrangements all over the world.

LITTLEJOHNS: Actually this is a fairly new thing, I think, isn't it? I mean Benon Sevan was the Coordinator before but now there is another person and that was one of the jobs he did amongst several. But now there's a specific person, right?

HEITZ: There is a Deputy Security Coordinator, Diana Russler, whose job is exclusively security.

LESSING: But are there enough people?

NGUYEN: Yes. But there is also a trust fund for that security protection of the administration here and I was told that only a few countries donate money for that secretariat.

None of the five permanent members has ever contributed money to that secretariat, is that correct?

HEITZ: I've had two questions now...

LESSING: No, no, no. The trust fund seems interesting because it might answer my question as well.

HEITZ: So let me answer yours first. There has been a lot of criticism within the Security Council about the fact that Mr. Benon Sevan wears two hats and the Secretary-General has proposed to create a position which would be exclusively devoted to the security of the staff.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is UNSECOORD?

HEITZ: UNSECOORD. Instead of being one of the portfolios with the Oil- for-Food Programme...

LITTLEJOHNS: Of which he is the head.

HEITZ: ...of which he is the head. It would be a single exclusive portfolio.

LESSING: But how many people do it now? How many people are in this little sub-unit?

LITTLEJOHNS: Very few, I suppose.

HEITZ: Let me say very few. That is a diplomatic answer. The Secretary-General has received authorization to create eight further posts.

LESSING: But then does this not go to your question about a trust fund? Are the two not related?

HEITZ: The trust fund was established to provide security training to the staff.

LITTLEJOHNS: What do governments and non-governmental organizations outside the UN family do to protect their people? After all, many of them have humanitarian aid workers in pretty scary situations. How do they protect their people?

HEITZ: I have never worked for these NGO's.

LITTLEJOHNS: No, but you have some ideas.

HEITZ: The idea I have is that some of them do much, much better than the UN system.

LESSING: How can the UN system then – are there examples that you'd like to give us of a good system that somebody is employing, some group is employing, that the UN should be also doing to be a good employer?

HEITZ: When you work for the International Red Cross, before you go to one of these difficult duty stations you undergo training, including training where you have to live and experience for instance hostage taking. So this is a very serious business.

LESSING: But that doesn't happen for UN staff?

HEITZ: When you work for the UN you very frequently get marching orders, your plane ticket, and that's it.

NGUYEN: Mr. Heitz, is HIV/AIDS considered part of the security threat against UN employees?

HEITZ: I wouldn't put it as a security threat. I would definitely put it as a question of safety and it is an important problem.

NGUYEN: Does a UN employee get appropriate briefing before going into a dangerous area?

HEITZ: It does not get much briefing I would say so far.

LESSING: Could I get back to another Timor question? It's just because security there – it was a small place, it is a small place, so it's easy to find examples. Three people were killed from the UNHCR just over the border in West Timor but working with people from East Timor in the refugee camps, in a place called Atambua. They were tried under Indonesian jurisdiction not so very long ago. The sentences were laughable – a few months. The judge even said in one case, "we can't really pin the blame on this person because there was a mob scene and we don't quite know who did it." This caused international outrage. If this isn't in some way addressed or corrected won't other groups of people think, "what the heck, we can get away with it too"?

HEITZ: You're absolutely correct.

LESSING: So how do you answer it? What do you do?

HEITZ: I can tell you that the Security Council has been very strong on that point and it was very strong on that point as well when we met the Council. So it is a preoccupation of the Security Council to ensure that murderers of UN staff members can't get away with impunity, or close to impunity, because really a few months, that is laughable.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Heitz, to put it mildly the United Nations is not universally popular and a lot of derogatory statements are made by some quite prominent people about the Organization in the West – and elsewhere. Now, this is one of the points that I think FICSA

picked up. To what extent does this kind of UN bashing encourage people to be doing threatening things in the field?

HEITZ: I think it is very simple. If you have people who come with the blue flag and the blue flag is not respected how do you expect the local population or those who have their own agenda -- which is one against which the UN is fighting – how can you believe that these people will respect the UN staff member? It's not possible.

NGUYEN: Do you plan to return before the Security Council and urge them to do more?

HEITZ: Each time we shall come back to New York – I mean the President of FICSA, Bernard Grandjean, who is stationed in Montreal – and each time I will come from Geneva, we shall meet delegates and we shall press the issue of the security of the staff on very materialistic points and on points which are major, such as ratification of conventions and so on.

NGUYEN: But you have met the Council only once in 55 years, how many more meetings before the Council can decide to act?

HEITZ: I think the Council will have to have its own meetings for quite a few months at least, and we should press the Security Council for another opportunity to speak to them at the earliest possible opportunity.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Heitz, we have only a few seconds left but you've left me at any rate with the impression that you think that the United Nations, or your organization thinks that the United Nations has been pretty negligent about this whole business.

HEITZ: Let us say from a historical point of view that the United Nations system has enjoyed a good reputation despite the bashing from certain quarters and it has been respected all over the world for quite a number of years.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Heitz, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle.**

Our guest has been Andre Heitz, General-Secretary of FICSA. He was interviewed by Tuyet Nguyen of the *German Press Agency/DPA* and Judy Lessing of *Radio New Zealand.*

I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

ANNOUNCER: Transcripts of the programme may be obtained free of charge by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to **World Chronicle**, United Nations, Room S-827L, New York, N.Y., 10017.

World Chronicle is broadcast worldwide and features guests whose work is concerned with major global issues. This programme is a Public Affairs Presentation of this station from United Nations Radio and Television.